

Sunday, June 13, 2010

**PCBs found at site of pool
Crompton work delayed**

By Nick Kotsopoulos TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF
nkotsopoulos@telegram.com

WORCESTER — The discovery of high levels of potentially harmful polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, in both the soil and concrete at the old Crompton Park municipal pool has set back construction of a new \$2.6 million pool complex there by six weeks.

As a result, the new pool will not be ready to open July 1 as city officials had hoped; instead, they are now looking to open it over the Labor Day weekend.

Robert L. Moylan Jr., commissioner of public works and parks, said as the project moves forward, the focus will be on the health and safety of the community and the long-term quality of the pool project.

“We will continue to focus on these items as we construct this facility over the next couple of months and during which time we will strive to find ways to reduce the critical path to open this facility as early as possible,” Mr. Moylan wrote in a report that goes before the City Council Tuesday night. “We will move this project forward in the quickest possible way without abdication from our priorities.”

The commissioner added that the contractor for the pool project has been asked to work extended days and even weekends so the construction schedule can be advanced. But even with an accelerated construction schedule, Mr. Moylan said, it is now projected that the pool facility will not be completed until mid-August.

No municipal pools were opened last summer because of their extraordinarily poor condition and city budget constraints.

Instead of spending money to repair any of the old pools, most of which are between 30 and 40 years old, the City Council voted in the fall to have a much

larger pool built at Crompton Park. It would be part of the aquatics plan the council asked the administration to implement. The plan could consist of three municipal pools, the two existing state pools, and five spray parks to be developed over seven years.

That new pool will have an area of 6,500 square feet — larger than any of the city's former municipal pools but smaller than the 8,000-square-foot state-owned Shine Pool in Vernon Hill Park. It will have capacity for 220 bathers, and feature a zero-depth entry, a splash-pad area for toddlers, a slide, three lap lanes, changing rooms, restrooms, outside showers and a picnic area.

While the new pool complex was being designed, a review of the old pool site had to be conducted to determine the presence of any hazardous materials, specifically PCB impregnated caulking material that was frequently used in pool construction in the 1960s and '70s.

An initial review revealed limited- and low-level PCB contamination in the caulking and in the adjacent concrete, Mr. Moylan said. But when work to remove the caulking began earlier this spring, tests conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found much higher PCB levels.

"As the results of the testing were received, areas that were previously unavailable for testing began to return with high levels of PCB contamination in both the soil and concrete," Mr. Moylan said. "This resulted in repeated testing and removal of both additional concrete and soil."

The threshold for PCB contamination in soil is 1 part per million. The PCBs found at the old pool did not pose any kind of airborne health hazard, however, because they are in solid form within the caulking, according to city officials.

City Manager Michael V. O'Brien said such pool caulking has become a focus of EPA concern during the past year. The agency established a strict protocol for the handling and disposition of PCB-contaminated materials through regulations established under the Toxic Substance Act.

"This removal and testing process was repeated until the EPA determined that the site was free of dangerous PCBs and construction could restart," Mr. O'Brien said.

“Unfortunately, this remediation process for the removal of hazardous PCBs has set the pool construction schedule back.”

Mr. Moylan said all of the hazardous material has been removed from the old pool and the EPA has given its clearance for its demolition. As of the end of last week, demolition work was almost complete.